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SUBJECT: BURMA'S GENERALS PROMOTE THEMSELVES

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- (B) FBIS BKK 291253Z MAR 93,
- (C) FBIS BKK 270923Z MAR 93

¶ 1. (C) SUMMARY: BURMA'S RULING STATE LAW AND ORDER RESTORATION COUNCIL (SLORC) PROMOTED MORE THAN A DOZEN TOP GENERALS IN CONNECTION WITH THE MARCH 27 ARMED FORCES DAY CELEBRATION. A MODEST RESTRUCTURING OF THE MILITARY HIERARCHY IS ALSO IN THE WORKS, WITH EASTERN REGIONAL COMMANDER MAUNG AYE SLATED TO FILL THE JUNTA'S NOMINAL NUMBER TWO POSITION. INTELLIGENCE CHIEF KHIN NYUNT WILL GET A SOMEWHAT FANCIER TITLE AND WILL LIKELY CONTINUE TO CALL MOST OF THE SHOTS. IN OTHER ARMED FORCES DAY DEVELOPMENTS, THOUGH CHIEF OF STATE THAN SHWE'S SPEECH WAS LESS STRIDENT THAN SIMILAR MESSAGES BY HIS PREDECESSOR, IT GAVE NO HINT OF COMPROMISE ON THE MILITARY'S DEMAND FOR A LEADING ROLE IN BURMA'S FUTURE POLITICAL SYSTEM. IN KEEPING WITH HIS DISAPPEARANCE FROM PUBLIC VIEW SINCE BEING REPLACED LAST YEAR, FORMER SLORC CHAIRMAN SAW MAUNG'S HISTORICAL ROLE HAS BEEN REDUCED FROM THE MAN WHO "SAVED BURMA" TO THAT OF A NON-PERSON. END SUMMARY.

¶ 2. (U) CAREFUL OBSERVERS OF THE BURMESE OFFICIAL MEDIA LEARNED THIS WEEK THAT A NUMBER OF TOP MILITARY OFFICERS WERE PROMOTED ON THE MARCH 27 ARMED FORCES DAY HOLIDAY (REFS A AND B). NONE OF THE CHANGES WAS SPECIFICALLY ANNOUNCED, BUT REPORTS ON THE ARMED FORCES DAY CEREMONIES INCLUDE NEW TITLES WHICH CONFIRM THAT AT LEAST TWELVE MAJOR GENERALS WERE ELEVATED TO THE THREE-STAR LIEUTENANT GENERAL RANK. AMONG THOSE PROMOTED WERE THE FOLLOWING SEVEN SLORC MEMBERS, ALL OF WHOM HAD BEEN TRANSFERRED OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS FROM POSITIONS AS REGIONAL MILITARY COMMANDERS TO TOP JOBS IN GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES:

-- MINISTER FOR DEVELOPMENT OF BORDER AREAS AND NATIONAL RACES MAUNG THINT (FORMERLY NORTHEAST REGIONAL COMMANDER);

-- MINISTER OF LABOR AYE THOUNG (FORMERLY SOUTHERN COMMANDER) ;

-- MINISTER OF MINES KYAW MIN (NORTHWESTERN COMMAND);

-- MINISTER OF HOTELS AND TOURISM KYAW BA (NORTHERN COMMAND) ;

-- MINISTER OF TRADE TUN KYI (CENTRAL COMMAND);

-- MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND DEFENSE SERVICES ADJUTANT GENERAL MYINT AUNG (SOUTHEASTERN COMMAND); AND

-- MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS MYA THINN (WESTERN COMMAND) .

RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS MINISTER MYO NYUNT WAS ALSO PROMOTED FROM MAJOR GENERAL TO LIEUTENANT GENERAL, THOUGH HE RETAINS HIS POST AS RANGOON REGIONAL COMMANDER FOR THE TIME BEING.

13. (C) FOUR OTHER MAJOR GENERALS WERE PROMOTED TO LIEUTENANT GENERAL AND WILL SOON BE GIVEN NEW POSTS, ACCORDING TO MILITARY INTELLIGENCE SOURCES:

-- EASTERN REGIONAL COMMANDER MAUNG AYE WILL BECOME THE NOMINAL "NUMBER TWO" IN THE MILITARY HIERARCHY, FILLING A VACANCY THAT HAS EXISTED SINCE GENERAL THAN SHWE REPLACED SENIOR GENERAL SAW MAUNG AS SLORC CHAIRMAN AND DEFENSE SERVICES COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ALMOST A YEAR AGO. MOST SOURCES BELIEVE THAT MAUNG AYE WILL SOON BECOME DEPUTY CINC OF THE DEFENSE SERVICES (TATMADAW) BUT REMAIN UNCERTAIN WHETHER HE WILL ALSO MOVE INTO THE VACANT ARMY CINC AND/OR SLORC DEPUTY CHAIRMANSHIP POSITIONS. THAN SHWE HAD OCCUPIED THESE POSTS CONCURRENTLY WITH THE NUMBER TWO "TATMADAW" SLOT.

-- POWERFUL MILITARY INTELLIGENCE CHIEF KHIN NYUNT WILL REPORTEDLY MOVE INTO A NEWLY CREATED THREE-STAR POSITION AS DIRECTOR OF "STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE" (SOURCES ARE UNSURE OF THE PRECISE TITLE) WHILE RETAINING HIS POSITION AS SLORC SECRETARY-1. HE MAY GIVE UP THE FORMAL DESIGNATION AS DIRECTOR OF DEFENSE SERVICES INTELLIGENCE (DDSI) BUT HIS NEW, BROADER DUTIES WILL INCLUDE OVERSIGHT OF DDSI AS WELL AS ALL OTHER MILITARY AND CIVILIAN INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES.

-- TIN OO WILL KEEP HIS JOB AS SLORC SECRETARY-2 WHILE MOVING FROM ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF TO HEAD ONE OF THE MILITARY'S TWO BUREAUX OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS (BSO-I). HE REPLACES LIEUTENANT GENERAL AND MINISTER OF INDUSTRY-1 SEIN AUNG IN THIS POSITION, RESPONSIBLE FOR COORDINATING ALL MILITARY OPERATIONS IN UPPER BURMA.

-- MILITARY APPOINTMENTS SECRETARY MAUNG HLA WILL REPLACE LIEUTENANT GENERAL AND FORESTRY MINISTER CHIT SWE AS HEAD OF THE OTHER SPECIAL OPERATIONS BUREAU (BSO-II), RESPONSIBLE FOR LOWER BURMA MILITARY ACTIONS.

14. (LOU) CHIEF OF STATE THAN SHWE DELIVERED THE TRADITIONAL ARMED FORCES DAY ADDRESS FOCUSING ON THE TATMADAW'S HISTORY IN THE STRUGGLES AGAINST IMPERIALISM, FASCISM, AND INTERNAL INSURGENCY (REF C). THE SPEECH WAS LESS HARD-LINE THAN THOSE GIVEN BY SAW MAUNG ON THIS OCCASION IN RECENT YEARS, OMITTING HOSTILE REFERENCES TO THE BRITISH AND JAPANESE WHICH HAD RILED THOSE NATIONS' DEFENSE ATTACHES. THAN SHWE SHOWED NO SIGN OF COMPROMISING ON DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUES, HOWEVER: WHILE HE REPEATED THE MILITARY'S STANDARD PROMISE TO TRANSFER POWER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, HE INSISTED THAT THE TATMADAW MUST PLAY A LEADING ROLE IN BURMA'S FUTURE POLITICAL SYSTEM.

15. (LOU) ALSO IN CONNECTION WITH ARMED FORCES DAY, THE GOB PUBLISHED SPECIAL NEWSPAPER SUPPLEMENTS AND ORGANIZED AN EXHIBIT ON THE HISTORY OF THE TATMADAW AND ITS LEADING PERSONALITIES. SEVERAL OBSERVERS NOTED THE STARK CONTRAST WITH THE TENOR OF LAST YEAR'S COMMEMORATION, WHICH FEATURED GUSHING TRIBUTES TO THE MILITARY CAREER OF SLORC CHAIRMAN SAW MAUNG. THIS YEAR THERE WERE NOTABLE GAPS WHERE THERE HAD ONCE BEEN REFERENCES TO THE EX-CHIEF OF STATE. WHILE FORMER DICTATOR NE WIN STILL FIGURES PROMINENTLY IN THE TATMADAW'S HISTORY, SAW MAUNG -- THE MAN WHO ONCE CLAIMED HE HAD "SAVED BURMA" -- HAS BEEN REDUCED TO A NON-PERSON.

16. (C) COMMENT: THIS YEAR'S ARMED FORCES DAY PROMOTIONS APPEAR TO SIGNAL STABILITY RATHER THAN SIGNIFICANT CHANGE WITHIN BURMA'S RULING CIRCLE. SEVERAL OF THE RECENTLY APPOINTED GOVERNMENT MINISTERS -- SUCH AS TUN KYI, KYAW BA, AND KYAW MIN -- WERE PROBABLY GIVEN THEIR THIRD STARS AS BELATED PAY-OFFS FOR THEIR EARLIER AGREEMENT (UNDER PRESSURE) TO GIVE UP LUCRATIVE POSITIONS AS REGIONAL COMMANDERS. PROMOTING VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE SLORC'S MAJOR GENERALS ALSO EASED THE WAY FOR KHIN NYUNT'S OWN ELEVATION TO

LIEUTENANT GENERAL: ELEVATING THE RELATIVELY JUNIOR INTELLIGENCE CHIEF MIGHT OTHERWISE HAVE ALIENATED THOSE WITH GREATER MILITARY SENIORITY. WHILE WE ASSUME HE WILL SHOW DUE RESPECT FOR THE COMMANDING ROLES OF THAN SHWE AND NOW MAUNG AYE, WE WOULD STILL EXPECT KHIN NYUNT TO CALL THE SHOTS ON MOST DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. WHATEVER HIS NEW FORMAL TITLE, THIS WILL BE LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE ROLE HE FIRMLY OCCUPIES AS POLITICAL STRATEGIST AND DECISION-MAKER ON ALL IMPORTANT ISSUES.

JAMESON